



# Panther Update

## February 2009

### Big Cat Field Stories

#### Transponder Chip Reveals K253 Had a Celebrity Sister Photos by Ralph Arwood

On January 17, the FWC responded to their second 2009 call about a road-killed panther in Collier County, Florida. The month of January ended with three panther deaths by vehicles in total (see table right). This young male, found near SR 29 and I75, was hit around two in the morning. Upon examination of the carcass, a transponder chip was found identifying him as K253, handled as one of four kittens in July 2007 at Big Cypress National Preserve. He is verifiably the son of FP150 and brother of Lucy! Those who have been following Florida panthers will remember that Lucy, or K255, had been abandoned at the first den when her mother moved the kittens to a new location. She was then removed from the wild and taken to Lowry Park Zoo in Tampa.



Above: K253(far right) with Lucy(back) and Siblings in July of 2007  
Below: A Star Attraction at the Zoo, Lucy Intrigues Her Admirers



After Lucy was removed, FP150 was rarely located in the palmetto thicket of the original den site during routine panther flights. The monitoring box, however, confirmed that she was returning to the new den and still caring for Lucy's siblings. Tragic as Lucy's brother's death is, at least there remains hope for the other two kittens.



K253's Mom Poised on a Pine Branch, Studies Her Captors

#### Why Fences and Underpasses?

Not all of State Road 29 is fenced to protect wildlife and officials believe Lucy's brother walked around the south end of the fence traveling approximately ¼ mile north to the I75 exit where he met his demise. According to the Florida Panther Recovery Plan, "Panther-vehicle collisions occur both where the fencing ends and when panthers enter a fenced area and become trapped between the fence and road." It's an argument for more complete fencing and more underpasses. Unsecured stretches of SR 29 and I-75 as well as several other roads continue to pose a serious mortality risk to panthers, including U.S. 41 (Tamiami Trail), SR 82, and County Roads 850 (Corkscrew Road), 858, 846 (Immokalee Road), 832, and 833. As with January's deaths, most mortalities or injuries in the past from panther-vehicle collisions occurred along these roads. Additional fencing along some areas of SR29 is especially important because of the extensive public lands on either side.

Date	Panther ID	Sex	Age	Location
1/11/2009	UCFP115	M	4	CR832, E of OK Slough SF
1/17/2009	K253	M	1.5	Eastbound exit ramp, I-75/SR29
1/20/2009	UCFP116	F	4-5	SR 29 3 mi S of Immokalee

January Road-deaths courtesy the FWC

Roadways present another potential obstacle to the recovery of the *Coryi* subspecies. Studies suggest that female Florida panthers tend to avoid establishing home ranges in areas bisected by highways. While it is hoped that eventually several females will disperse north of the Caloosahatchee River, there is not a strong likelihood if those females who are seeking their own territory simply abort attempts to cross roads into new areas. The Recovery Plan calls for a population to be established in central Florida, but roads make it difficult for females to venture north. There currently exist no known females north of the Caloosahatchee River. Some males have been able to disperse there only to fail in finding mates.

**NEWSFLASH!:** In the last two days of the month of January, two Florida panthers were captured. On *January 30*, the FWC team collared a male in Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation recorded as FP166. The Big Cypress National Preserve capture team recollared FP161 on *January 31*. Photos and details to come in next month's issue!

## Ask a Biologist

### **What's a Transponder Chip?** By Mark Lotz, Panther Biologist

A transponder chip gets implanted at the den site under the loose skin found between the shoulder blades of a panther kitten. A hand held reader can then be passed over the animal, emitting an electromagnetic field through the antenna which energizes the transponder. The reader then receives the code signal returned by the transponder. When a marked animal is recaptured (either alive or as road-kill) we can determine valuable information such as survivorship and dispersal patterns. To implant one in a kitten, we simply insert the sterilized needle loaded with a chip into a reusable syringe. The needle is a very small gauge but it doesn't seem that small when I am getting ready to slide it into a kitten!



Sterilized Needle with Transponder Chip

## What Humans are Doing

- **"Panther Alert" for Florida Drivers, January 26** article by the Public News Service of Florida, contains an audio with statements from Mark Lotz of the FWC and Elizabeth Fleming with Defenders of Wildlife. <http://www.publicnewsservice.org/index.php?content/article/7779-1>
- **Florida Forever Restored on January 27!** Governor Charlie Crist vetoed language in the FY 2008-09 State budget that would have suspended a majority of Florida Forever land acquisitions this year. Visit <http://www.supportfloridaforever.org/>
- **The Conservancy of Southwest Florida issued a petition in January** to the Obama Administration to Designate Critical habitat for the endangered Florida Panther. [http://ms2.naplesnews.com/npdn/content/static/Critical\\_Habitat\\_Petition\\_-\\_Florida\\_Panther.pdf](http://ms2.naplesnews.com/npdn/content/static/Critical_Habitat_Petition_-_Florida_Panther.pdf)

## What You Can Do This Month

### **Visit Ralph Arwood's Panther Photography Exhibition at the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary during February.**

Does your Valentine enjoy panthers, beautiful photography, and wildlife? Why not treat him/her to an outing at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary? For the last five years Ralph has worked with the biologists at Big Cypress National Preserve on the Florida Panther Capture Team; and for the last two years he has used trail cameras to document Florida panthers at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. His photographs provide a rare glimpse into the life of the Florida panther, featuring about 30 panthers from both locations. Find them at the Blair Center foyer at Corkscrew.

**For details:** <http://www.corkscrew.audubon.org/>

**Combine the art show with an activity at the Sanctuary:** <http://www.corkscrew.audubon.org/calendar2.html>

### **MARK YOUR CALENDARS!**

**"Naples Preserve hosts a Panther Presentation", March 17, Tuesday:** The adult presentation begins 11am; then enjoy lunch! Starting at 3:30pm, there is an after-school program for ages 7 – 11. Sign up now! 261-4290 or email [PreserveCaptains@aol.com](mailto:PreserveCaptains@aol.com)

**"Panthers in Peril", March 18,** a talk at the Conservancy, with Dave Shindle 6 – 8pm. Discover why only 80-100 of these elusive creatures remain. An enjoyable evening with one-of-a-kind photos from field research in Southwest Florida's panther territory. Sign up at [www.conservancy.org](http://www.conservancy.org)

**Florida Panther Week, March 14 – 21:** A week of activities for the community includes 5 major events, swamp walks, bike rides, slide shows, and fun! Florida Panther Refuge's Open House is the highlight as we share the unique resources of the refuge with the public! Watch the Friends' website for details. <http://floridapanther.org/>

**Save the Panther Day" Panther Refuge Open House, March 21, Saturday 8 – Noon.** Share a fun day with your family, while exploring the Panther Refuge from a swamp buggy or walking the trails learning about birds, plants & orchids, and of course, looking for the wild panther! Includes fun kids' activities! RSVP Starting March 9. Space is limited. Sign up for tours by calling 353-8442 x 229

## Special Thanks To.....

Layne Hamilton, [Florida Panther and Ten Thousand Islands NWR](#)

Mark Lotz (FWC), [Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission](#)

Ralph Arwood, [Big Cypress National Preserve](#)

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